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Visual organizing: Balancing coordination and creative freedom via mood boards☆

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ABSTRACT

How is organizing accomplished in contexts that require coordination to be balanced with creative freedom? The paper addresses this question by building on literature that highlights the active role of objects in coordination and organizing processes as well as the recent turn to visual objects in organization studies. Using empirical data from a design process in artistic perfumery, the paper shows how independent actors and their sub-products are coordinated by means of a visual mood board that is able to maintain plurality while also having a directing and aligning effect. We discuss the potential of mood boards as an example of the wider phenomenon of aesthetic objects, connecting senses and emotion and providing a link across people in the creative industries and elsewhere.

1. Introduction

How people coordinate and align sub-products in new product development processes has been the object of sustained interest (Bechky, 2003; Carlile, 2002, 2004; Okhuysen & Bechky, 2009 for overview). As new products are increasingly distinguished by their aesthetics and design (Postrel, 2003), product development processes focus on innovation and creativity, often involving professionals from creative backgrounds, such as designers (Reckwitz, 2012). However, current literature suggests that managing creative professionals requires new forms of organizing (e.g., Gotsi, Andriopoulos, Lewis, & Ingram, 2010). For example, Kellogg, Orlikowski, and Yates (2006)) show that creative workers are likely to resist coordination mechanisms that engineers or customer service representatives readily accept. Elsbach (2009) points out that designers value opportunities for expressing signature styles, and Florida (2002) describes autonomy and self-expression as core values of creative workers. Managing creative workers and creative work as such therefore poses important challenges for management (DeFillippi, Grabher, & Jones, 2007), such as how to organize product development processes to balance the need for integration and coordination with the imperatives of creativity and autonomy (Cohendet & Simon, 2007; Florida, 2002). The tension between these two requirements can be felt particularly strongly in product development processes in temporary (Bechky, 2006) or latent organizations (Starkey, Barnatt, & Tempest, 2000), where networks of loosely coupled actors work independently to accomplish specific tasks.

This paper tries to understand the challenge of managing creative workers by examining the micro-processes of organizing in new product development in the creative industries. More specifically, it focuses on the development of a new signature perfume by the German label Humiecki & Graef (H&G). H&G is part of an emerging niche market known as artistic perfumery, characterized by experimental and highly innovative fragrances. The development process at H&G involves five different, semi-autonomous groups of actors (creative director, perfumers, photographer, packaging designer, writer), coordinated largely via a means of a visual object that represents a mood board. Owing to its affordances, the mood board helps narrow the array of creative possibilities and align the sub-products while opening space for creative autonomy, flexibility, and self-expression. Coordinating via mood board thus balances the seemingly contradictory exigencies of organizing creative people and creative work (e.g., DeFillippi et al., 2007; Gotsi et al., 2010).

The paper contributes to an understanding of how visual and material artifacts support creativity and coordination in the creative

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industries. Increasing interest in the role of objects in coordination (Okhuysen & Bechky, 2009) and the recent turn to the visual dimension of organizing (Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary, & van Leeuwen, 2013) provide the theoretical backdrop for this study. While past research focused on formal coordination mechanisms such as hierarchy or rules, attention is increasingly turning to emergent (Jarzabkowski, Le & Feldman, 2012; Kellogg et al., 2006) and materially mediated coordination mechanisms (Bechky, 2003; Carlile, 2002, 2004; Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009; Henderson, 1991). The empirical data illustrate how mood boards, as a visual expression of intangible qualities (e.g., an idea or vision for a new product), depart from formal coordination mechanisms by allowing for autonomy while expressing a shared aesthetic vision. Visual objects provide explanatory value for managing creative workers, emphasizing the role of visual objects in coordination (e.g., Okhuysen & Bechky, 2009), and adding to the visual turn in management and organization studies (Bell & Davison, 2013; Bell, Warren, Schroeder, & Warren, 2013; Meyer et al., 2013). The findings and its implications are discussed and the potential of visual organizing for sectors marked by creative, aesthetic, or emotional features is outlined.

2. Coordination and creativity as material processes

2.1. Coordination and creativity

Recent work on management in the creative industries has pointed to tensions that exist in the quandary of coordination versus creativity (e.g., DeFillippi et al., 2007; Florida, 2002; Lampel, Lant, & Shamsie, 2000). Particularly, creative production involves both processes of differentiation, whereby creative producers manage sub-products with relative creative autonomy, and integration, whereby sub-products must cohere with a common aesthetic vision (e.g., Nandhakumar, Panourgias, & Scarbrough, 2013).

Creative workers may resist coordination attempts, viewing them as controlling, managerialist, or constraining their artistic expression (e.g., Hackley & Kover, 2007; Kellogg et al., 2006). According to Lampel et al. (2000), such tensions, while common to many, if not most professions, are particularly acute in the creative industries, which are characterized simultaneously by a strong bias for autonomy and the need for creative coherence in product design.

Addressing the challenge of managing creative workers, Gotsi et al. (2010) outline strategies to balance creative workers' fractious identity processes from creating hierarchies, to defining employees' roles, to establishing the "rules of the game". They emphasize identity work relating to paradoxical roles and the creation of abstract meta-identities facilitating simultaneous senses of togetherness and autonomy. Other treatments of managing creatives (e.g., Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007) emphasize individualized practices of employee management to negotiate tensions between creative and managerial requirements. Within a theater context, individualized management allowed directors to counterbalance art and commerce demands, minimizing standardized HRM practices and emphasizing idiosyncratic practices (e.g., one-on-one talks) adapted to individual actors. Such practices, although time consuming, enhanced actors' motivation and strengthened personal relationships, providing a space to reconcile economic logics and artistic requirements. Similarly, Cohendet and Simon (2007) focus on the exploration-exploitation tension in videogame development, where creativity and artistic expression are balanced with the economic constraints of mass entertainment. Such balancing led to a hybrid management form, with decentralized platforms to support informal interactions, creative slack and distance from evaluation, yet also ensuring control through strict time constraints.

Importantly, these studies focus on relational or structural aspects of management, on relating *interpersonally* with creative workers or instituting policies to manage tensions. Such studies can be complemented by emerging literature suggesting that *material* artifacts can be instrumental in structuring coordination and creating spaces for creativity. Creative workers often rely on material supports for their work, from charts to drawings to electronic technologies, and their work is largely formed in relation to these supports (e.g., Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009; Henderson, 1991; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012). By focusing on how creative workers use key material artifacts, the paper explores how tensions may be mediated, providing a new perspective to the challenge of coordinating creativity.

2.2. Coordination by objects

Scholars have ascribed increasing importance to materiality and material objects in supporting organizing processes from the role of PowerPoint for strategy making (Kaplan, 2011), Gannt charts for managing time (Yakura, 2002), photocopiers for organizational positioning (Suchman, 2007), or text and memos for coordination and control purposes (Yates, 1985). Within the creative industries, the role of objects has been acknowledged for facilitating career boundary transitions (Jones, 2010), for mediating between creative and business demands (Lampel & Mustafa, 2009), and for facilitating collective sensemaking in design processes (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012). In each of these cases, objects work to consolidate narratives among producers and to coordinate across boundaries, with scholars in the area invoking the now well-studied concept of boundary objects (Star & Griesemer, 1989) for theoretical support.

Building upon studies of objects in scientific work (Latour, 1987), organizational scholars note that knowledge is embedded in material practices and that objects communicate both technical and social qualities (Star & Griesemer, 1989), providing information and offering common points of reference, two cognitive functions generally considered important for coordinating actors (Okhuysen & Bechky, 2009: 474).

While objects in such coordination settings include drawings, prototypes, or machines (e.g., Bechky, 2003; Carlile, 2002, 2004), few authors explicitly address the visual affordances of these objects, that is, the possibilities for action given by a particular instrument or sensory modality (Gibson, 1979). A rare exception, Henderson (1991) emphasizes visual qualities in her study of design engineers. She notes the pervasive use of drawings, sketches, and visual representations, used to communicate, discuss, and negotiate knowledge and ideas during the design and production process.

> Coordination and conflict take place over, on, and through the drawings. These visual representations shape the structure of the work … They are a component of the social organization of collective cognition and the locus for practice-situated and practice-generated knowledge (Henderson, 1991: 449).

Similarly, Ewenstein and Whyte (2009) illustrate the central role of visual representations in architectural practice. The visual representation of the product is seen to mediate and initiate coordination and dialogical processes in which knowledge is shared and reflected.

Current literature on objects in coordination focuses on the rather technical nature of objects and visual representations (e.g., drawings, sketches, prototypes, machines, documentation). They symbolically depict or represent the elements of a new turbine engine (Henderson, 1991), a building, roof, or car park (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009), valves for automobile fuel systems (Carlile, 2002, 2004), or a semiconductor (Bechky, 2003). Perhaps because of its roots in science and technology studies, the role of objects as technical supports has been the primary target of interest. Recently, however, objects have been recognized as also facilitating *emotional* or *sensory* processes, largely through their ability to ground narratives (e.g., Lampel & Mustafa, 2012, on perfumery). While such perspectives have not focused on visuality per se, they open new vistas for research into the material affordances of objects.

2.3. Mood boards as visual artifacts

In organizational research, the role of visual material has been recognized as a promising field (Bell et al., 2013; Meyer et al., 2013), with Bell and Davison (2013) claiming a visual turn in management and organization studies. According to Meyer et al. (2013), it is "the specific *performativity* of visuals and visual discourse – working differently from other modes of communication – that holds ample potential." (p. 2, emphasis in original). As some have noted, looking at images is able to simultaneously produce a sense of detachment and engagement (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2005; Taussig, 1993) and combines rationality with emotionality (Belova, 2006), fostering a cognitive as well as emotional engagement with objects. Others have referred to visuals as "spaces for representation" (Rheinberger, 1997), bridging the concrete and the abstract. Ewenstein and Whyte (2009) use this aspect to explain the ability of images to make boundaries more permeable, for example, between different design disciplines. This leads scholars to refer to visual representations as boundary objects: they are able to create common points of reference, while remaining open to different interpretations (Star & Griesemer, 1989).

The interpretive diversity of boundary objects can be further explained through both the compositional properties of their aesthetic components and their use in practice. Visuals offer opportunities for bird's eye representations and mappings of compositional elements, associated with notions of objectivity as well as control (Classen, 1993). At the same time, the associative aspect of visuals allows for reinterpretation and juxtaposition (Meyer et al., 2013), affording pluralistic treatments while maintaining the specificity of representation. These different affordances for practice allow visuals to be leveraged into specific configurations of control versus autonomy, balancing the two through selective emphasis on particular visual qualities.

Long overlooked in mainstream industries, the creative industries, particularly the fashion and design industries, have an established tradition of working with visuals in the form of *theme* or *mood boards*. Mood boards are used in design processes to "introduce a certain mood, theme, or consumer world" (Godlewsky, 2008, p. 266) and are often employed in designer-client communications (Eckert & Stacey, 2003). Mood boards are also used in briefings to communicate ideas for new products or the look and feel of the final product, embodying the aesthetic knowledge and judgment of the designer (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009; McDonagh & Storer, 2004). As Islam, Endrissat and Noppeney (in press) have shown, mood boards are able to trigger analogical reconfigurations across senses that support innovative solutions in product design processes.

Besides expressing moods or evoking emotions, mood boards provide inspiration (Eckert & Stacey, 2003) and summary representations of wider development processes. Mood boards resemble sketchy collages (Godlewsky, 2008) and are created from diverse visual materials, such as images, text, and fabrics (Eckert & Stacey, 2003). They are important tools during the design briefings that mark the beginning of a new product. Briefings are "short meeting[s] at which someone is given an instruction (the brief) and a bit of background on a project and asked to deliver a solution" (Blyth & Worthington, 2001: 3). Briefings can involve different actors, such as project managers, clients, design team members, or users; they can mark a single point in time or a continuous process and can be adjusted according to product development needs (Blyth & Worthington, 2001; Dankl, 2013). Briefs can be textual (written description) or visual (mood or theme boards), and may include videos, music, poems, or designed spaces. The perfume brief in mainstream perfumery often includes images of a particular scent family (Burr, 2008; Pybus, 2006) and focuses on a particular target consumer segment.

In short, design briefs in the form of mood boards are central to the organizing and development process of new products, particularly in the fashion and perfume industries. Yet, despite this centrality, the potential of mood boards to coordinate diverse actors in cross-disciplinary projects is not well understood.

3. Empirical case

3.1. Research site

Humiecki & Graef (H&G) is a Cologne-based perfume label, recognized among industry experts as an innovator in artistic perfumery. H&G launches about one scent each year, each of which is designed around a basic human emotion with an emphasis on complex, polyvalent emotions, such as melancholy, motherly pride, or fury.

The development process for a new perfume involves cross-disciplinary coordination among various design disciplines (see Fig. 1 for overview). The actors include: 1) the *creative director*, responsible for the perfume's theme and name, the creation of the mood board for briefing purposes, and overall product coordination. 2) The independent *perfumers* who develop the *fragrance*. 3) The independent *photographer* who shoots the *campaign photography*. 4) The *packaging designers*, responsible for internal and external *packaging design* (box, flacon, cap). 5) An independent *professional writer* who composes the *marketing text*. These actors, in addition to having different product responsibilities and design backgrounds, are geographically dispersed between Zurich, Berlin, New York, and Cologne. They all work from the same briefing information via the mood board (Fig. 3; see also Islam et al., in press); their work processes take place in parallel, with each actor/group of actors working independently on their sub-products.

3.2. Method

The study employs a longitudinal single case approach that includes following a complete product development cycle as the process unfolds. The study approaches data from a practice perspective with an emphasis on studying the material entanglements of organizing (e.g., Orlikowski & Scott, 2008) by following actors and materials to describe how action and meaning are born. This perspective joins scholars such as Ashcraft, Kuhn, and Cooren (2009) in viewing materiality as constitutive of organizing. While Cooren (2004) stresses textual agency, the present study extends this perspective to include visual texts in addition to written or oral texts. Noting a shift "from the centrality of writing to the increasing significance of image" (McDonagh, Goggin, & Squier, 2005: 80), the present study focuses on the role of visual agency in organizing. Agency is not deterministic but involves a co-production between actors working through material artifacts (Endrissat & Noppeney, 2013). The visual materiality acts as relational support during the product development process. Methodologically, this implies paying attention to how the social and organizational relations (i.e. dynamics of coordination and creativity) are intertwined with the material supports for these relations (i.e. how such dynamics are constructed and represented through artifacts). This approach leads to the following question: What role do visual materials (here, the mood board) play in organizing new product development processes, where independent actors from different creative domains are responsible for various sub-products?

3.3. Data collection

Data were collected over 18 months (October 2010-April 2012), of which the first 7 months cover the product development process that is reported in this paper. Because the initial research interest was to better understand the material practices of organizing, the data collection was exploratory in nature. To ensure some triangulation for the main findings, multiple data sources were used, including non-participant observations, interviewing, and diverse material artifacts (Charmaz, 2006). These data were collected at the H&G design agencies in Zurich and Cologne and the perfumers' studios in Berlin and New York. At the design agency and the perfumers' studio, extensive field notes were written, photographs taken and the whole process videotaped, recording and transcribing formal interviews (ranging from 40 min to 4 h)

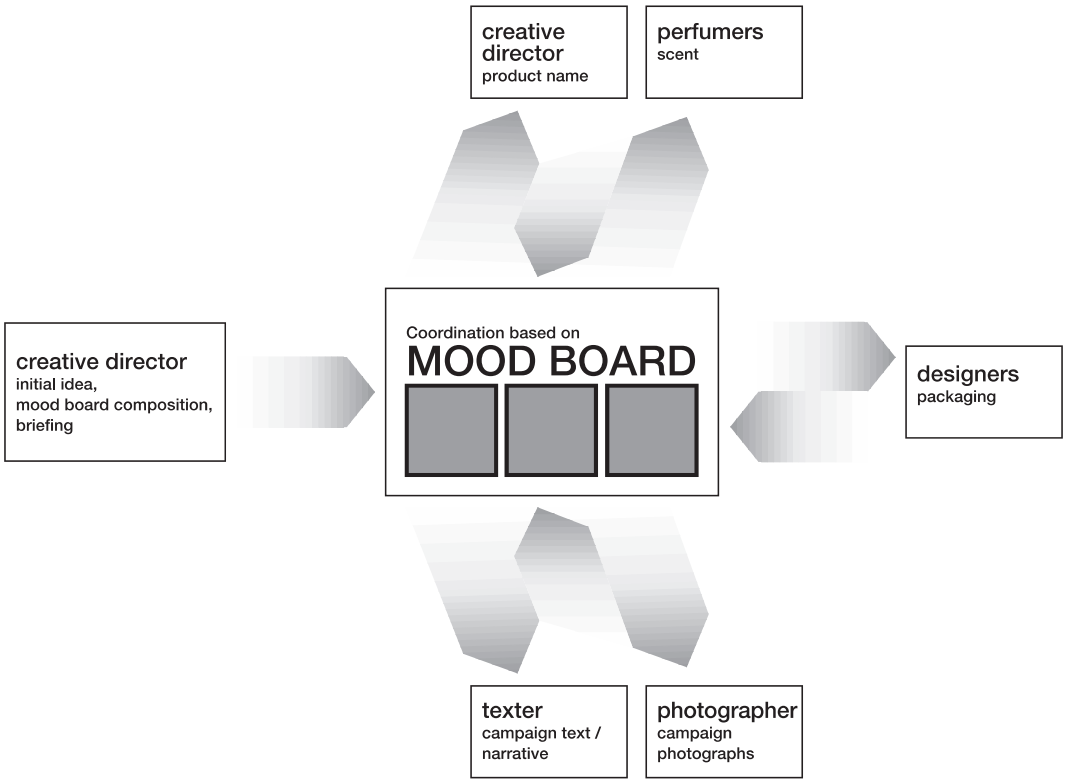

Fig. 1. The role of the mood board in the perfume development process: balancing coordination and creative freedom.

with the creative director, the perfumers, the photographer, and the packaging designers. The context of everyday activities was used for frequent informal interviews, and related documents were collected (e.g., email correspondence, sketches) and material samples (e.g., perfume versions that were disqualified and thrown out). During videoing and photographing, the pre-post observations suggested that no disruption of the work process was taking place because of the researchers' presence; with no visible behavioral changes, and feedback from the perfumers confirmed that the cameras had merged invisibly into the background.

During the data collection process, the mood board emerged as an object with central importance for the organization of the creative work and its actors. It was therefore decided to pay particular attention to it and to refine the research focus as outlined in the research question above.

3.4. Data analysis

An inductive analysis follows the iterative process described by Strauss and Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; see also Charmaz, 2006). The analyses included three major steps as we went back and forth between the data and the emerging themes (see Fig. 2 for an overview of the data analysis).

In a first step, the first and third author separately engaged in open coding of the transcribed interviews and their field notes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This coding was supported by the software program atlas.ti. Both authors also looked at the photographs that were linked to the field notes and coded these by labeling them and putting them in different sub-folders in Iphoto 11. Next, the initial codings were compared and commonalities and differences discussed, grouping codes together in axial codes. When interpretations differed, photographs and videos were consulted and discussed among the researchers. Unresolvable ambiguities were addressed during formal debriefing interviews taking place after the data analysis had begun. Third, by reviewing and discussing the emerging axial codes, the mood board's main functions were recognized to involve two seemingly contradictory aspects of managing creative workers: *coordinating* (aligning) them and granting them *creative freedom* (autonomy). These two represent the study's theoretical concepts. During this third phase, engagement with literature, particularly the editorials by Lampel et al. (2000) and DeFillippi et al. (2007) was carried out to get a better understanding of what the data could be about and where it could make a contribution, leading to the current framing of the case as an act of balancing coordination and creative freedom.

4. Findings

The mood board is created in the first month of the process, beginning with the creative director's initial insight into the product's theme. It supports *coordination* via processes of a.) setting the scene, b.) directing activities & aligning sub-products, and c.) establishing a point of reference. It provides *creative freedom* via a.) leaving room for interpretation, b.) providing a source of inspiration, and c.) allowing self-expression and signature style (see Fig. 2 for overview). How these two aspects come together is described below.

4.1. Setting the scene

In creating the mood board, the director chooses specific images meant to convey the theme of the perfume; these images are selected from diverse media sources and are overlaid in collage form. However, the creative director then melds and mixes the forms in such a way as to blur their boundaries and exact identities, leading to a semi-abstract figure in which only partial objects are decipherable.

The mood board thus introduces the theme for the perfume in a way that leaves ample room for reinterpretation. Upon receiving it in electronic form via email, the creative workers (see Fig. 1) involved in product development must apprehend the overall idea of the product, in this case, the emotion of trust — the feeling of being in good hands. The mood board alludes to the connection between an older and a younger

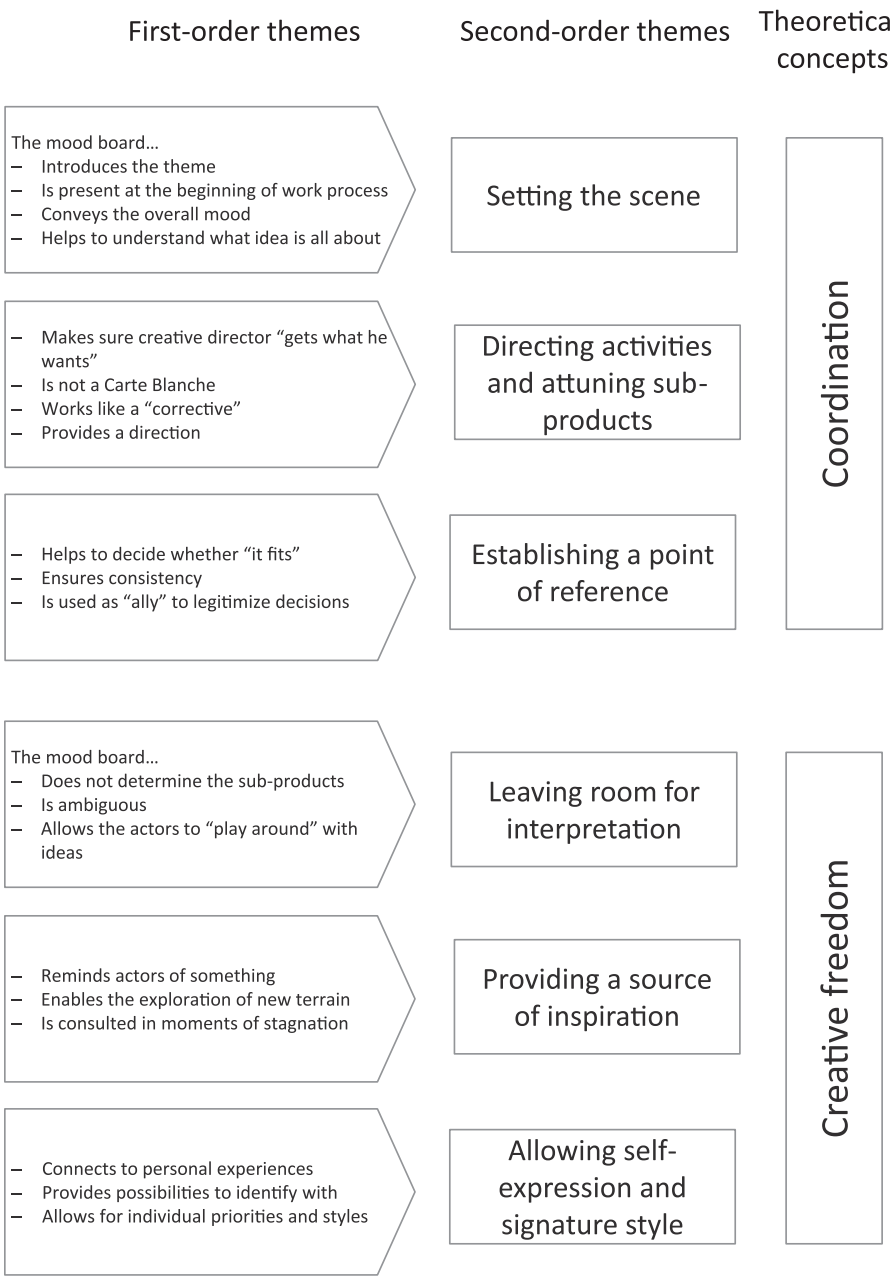

Fig. 2. The mood board's organizing activities: Overview of data findings.

man and situates this connection in carefully selected details (e.g., red wine, laurel). Above all, it conveys a tone, a set of colors and a rhythm that orchestrates the three images (see Fig. 3).

The specific atmosphere and aesthetic quality of the mood board sets the scene for the sub-processes of fragrance development, packaging design and campaign photography. Thus, the creative director has an initial and immediate influence, mediated by the mood board, in the feeling of the final product. At the same time, after this initial communication , the mood board is left to "float" among the members without further direction from the creative director, a period in which the meanings of the board are interpreted, negotiated, and deciphered according to the artistic preferences of each team member.

Thus, although the visualization of the image occurs instantaneously, the process of developing a sense of its meaning occurs over time. As Julia, the packaging designer, expresses, she needs a few days to digest the mood board before she can really get "a feel for her role on the stage" set out by the mood board. Apparently, the creative director is aware of this delayed operational impact. He contacts the actors via telephone only some time after sending the visual brief, to clarify his idea and discuss possible questions. In this first coordinative aspect of setting the scene, the mood board differs from other forms of communicating requirements that mainly focus on technical functionalities whose already codified properties do not require digesting.

As the creative director stressed several times, the mood board was fixed and non-alterable after its initial construction. It thus exerted a certain autonomy from later processes. However, actors did not confront a static relation to the object, because of the ongoing work in interpreting, weighing different elements, and collective evaluation of the object. Thus, while the board itself did not change, its meanings were part of an ongoing process. As the lead perfumer states:

> Sometimes I walk around the lab, I look in my library of things, I go through it and (wonder: could this be something?) … Sometimes I think of things… You get the visual briefing and then you... There

Fig. 3. The mood board in the perfume development process.

are a few days before you start … Me, I always get ideas when I don't think of them, it's always like that, in the shower or the gym. … I can be thinking about the holidays, I can be thinking of other things and then all of a sudden I say, oh … It comes. You can be walking around. You know, it brews.

Thus, the mood board not only sets the scene content-wise, but also in terms of its mere presence as a visual and aesthetic object. This is particularly salient in the laboratory work setting of the perfumers. In this world of technical precision, the mood board, placed in between chemical formulas, stands out and attracts attention.

4.2. Directing activities & attuning sub-products

In addition to the orientation function, the mood board also directs numerous activities once the development process has started. One key activity is the selection of appropriate materials. Julia, the packaging designer, describes how the mood board motivates the search for material that would match the overall mood and emotion described by it. In this case, the mood board directs the selection of cork as a material for the cap without explicitly referring to cork in the images. By not specifying materials directly, it suggests a certain aesthetic feeling that drives material selection in a more general way.

Likewise, the perfumers also consult the mood board in detail before sketching initial ideas for the fragrance. The observations show that the lead perfumer repeatedly flipped through the three images before getting up to select several fragrance essences from the lab. Looking at the mood board, he smelled the fragrances repeatedly as if comparing his olfactory impression with the visual images and trying to look for an answer from the mood board. The mood board thus provides a general direction and meaning for his activities.

In the beginning of the process, the mood board merely communicates the basic idea for the development and provides a first sense of direction. However, at critical moments, it clarifies questions and concerns and directs the evolution of the idea. When the refinement of the scent had reached an impasse, both perfumers regularly picked up the mood board as if to gain new insights from it. As discussed below, they thereby establish a point of reference to direct their creation, centering their interpretations around the original vision.

In one of the formal interviews, one perfumer describes how using the mood board alleviates ambiguity during the development process, allowing him to proceed with certainty during the creation of the scent. "I feel rather certain when working on the project … the mood board keeps me grounded."

To make sure that they are on the right track, all creative professionals (photographer, perfumers, packaging designer) consult the mood board frequently and compare their own ideas against it. The mood board not only directs the activities along the different development processes, but also attunes the different sub-products to a common theme. Moreover, the creative director uses the board to base his judgments as to whether the material and the sub-product fit with the overall idea (see below).

4.3. Establishing a point of reference

During the development of the fragrance, the perfumers repeatedly evaluate the provisional versions that they create. Sitting at a desk, facing each other, the two perfumers conduct the evaluation together, with the mood board present on the table as well. From the field notes:

> They sit face-to-face to each other at one of the perfumer's desk. In front of them on the table is a copy of the mood board. The visuals continuously function as a subtle eye-catcher for the two perfumers. When they cannot agree which of the different formulas to take further, C (one of the perfumers) picks up the printout and, holding it in his hand – as if having an ally at his side – tells his partner that this scent does not fit with his interpretation of the mood board. Even though he thinks the sent smells nice, he argues – pointing at the mood board – that the images ask for something different.

At this moment, the mood board serves as a point of reference, as a source of legitimization at moments of aesthetic non-alignment. It is being used to solve a contradiction that arises out of the different interpretations the perfumers might have. While one perfumer looks for masculine, floral notes, the other perfumer has something "stronger" in mind. Listening to his argument, one could get the impression that the mood board demands a different scent composition. Again, this shows the active role of the mood board in structuring the direction of the scent.

In other moments, the perfumers make statements like: "this fits with the brief" or "this is not in line with the brief". In all these cases, the creative decisions are not only guided by, but also legitimized for others through reference to the mood board.

Similarly, Marcel, the other packaging designer, explains how the mood board supports the evaluation as a point of reference by giving the creative director a basis for judging whether the materials and the sub-products fit the overall idea.

> And when I present my ideas, I think [the creative director] looks at my prototypes and even though he didn't know that it would be cork, when he sees the cork he knows that it is a perfect match. … The mood board allows him to make decisions. When I show the alternative prototype to him, he is immediately able to say "no, no, no" and then, when he sees the cork, he takes a look at it, and then says "yes, cork would be a good fit", then looks at it again and decides "cork is perfect, we take cork".

Judging from these observations and the actors' evaluation, the specific form of the brief seems to powerfully coordinate the development

process, ensuring the product's quality and coherence. As one perfumer concludes "I am sure that it (the creative director's satisfaction with the final product) is due to the visual brief. … I believe that it has the biggest share in ensuring that Sebastian [the creative director] gets what he wants."

All in all, the mood board provides a common point of reference for the diverse development processes and guides the actors along their individual processes. Moreover, the mood board takes on an active role and demands definition, triggers discussion, and spurs the development on. Fig. 4 provides some visual impressions of the mood board in action.

4.4. Leaving room for interpretation

While serving as a coordination device, the mood board also allows for creative freedom, balancing the two in a number of ways. Lacking any technical definition, the mood board is relatively open for interpretation. Asked about the development process and his interpretation of the mood board, the lead perfumer explains:

> Ah, yes, well, I make my own, my own description, but one that translates into the same feeling. Same when we … for Skarb, the men who cry (another fragrance which is built around the feeling of melancholy) … For them [H&G], it was very religious, and so I could see it religiously, the pilgrims going up the mountains on their knees and all that, but then the men were crying. So I was thinking also of the sailors, the flamenco singers, … I thought of two or three other men … the kind of men who cry, something he (the creative director) would have never thought of.

Rather than obstructing the processes, the imagery, its openness and emphasis on the aesthetic dimension allow these different interpretations to become sources of creativity. The mood board does not primarily convey factual statements that call for a logical examination, instead capturing and mobilizing in the words of the creative director "a surreality" that comprises a flexible source of stimulation and inspiration. The packaging designer reflects on this openness:

> This mood board makes a difference. The visuals help me to imagine how the product might look … The mood board provides a direction. But the final product only becomes clear during the process.

Providing direction and openness are balanced such that the final creation is not determined in advance, but is nevertheless guided by the visual image.

Similarly, one of the perfumers, comparing this specific briefing process to other client briefings, explains that the collaboration with Sebastian is more fun, because the process emphasizes creativity. The other perfume briefings had included more literal specifications, showing images of ingredients directly (e.g., fruit or other compositional features) rather than suggestively and in abstract composition. The perfumer appreciates the mood board, because its interpretive openness supports creativity while ingredient-driven briefings require technical craftsmanship. According to him, the mood board opens up possibilities for creative experimentation and supports the exploration of new terrains.

4.5. Providing a source of inspiration

The data suggest that creativity rarely unfolded in a continuous or steady process. In many instances, situations of sudden and rather spontaneous creativity were witnessed that occurred during moments when the process seemed inhibited. From the field notes:

> In the afternoon, the lead perfumer went back to his H&G folder and took out the printed version of the mood board to browse through the images as if looking for new ideas and inspiration. He also took out a printed version of the email that the creative director had sent with feedback information. He looked at both very attentively. Then, after a longer period of quiet reflection and thinking — of going back and forth and making several adjustments, he came up with four different variations of the standard formula, that is trust formula version number 34, 35, 36, 37. His assistant then went to the lab room to mix and weigh these new versions.

By consulting the mood board, the perfumer gains some very specific and rather detailed insights. The observations show how the interaction with the "unusual and ambiguous images" as the lead perfumer calls the mood board, are able to trigger short and intensive creative impulses.

By contrast to the coordination aspect discussed above, this situation highlights how the mood board stimulates creativity by providing a source of inspiration. The mood board ignites subjective associations and enables new ideas that reflect a high degree of creative freedom.

4.6. Allowing self-expression and signature styles

The aspect of creative freedom goes beyond associative logic, involving the creative professionals personally and emotionally. During the debriefing interviews, both the lead perfumer and the photographer recounted stories of how they were able to personally relate to the mood board. For example, when looking at the mood board for the first time, the photographer is spontaneously reminded of a photograph that his father took of his mother on their honeymoon many years ago. He has various associations and recalls a trip to Denmark:

> I had travelled to Denmark last year in January and taken pictures of the cliffs … And I thought of them (the rocks) to introduce the idea of something stable, calm, and secure.

The example illustrates how the creative workers link the meaning of the images to significant personal experiences, which enables them to relate to the mood board and the idea for the perfume in a way that goes beyond an analytical understanding. Because of its openness, the mood board allows the actors to establish personal associations while also giving a sense of direction to these ideas. They can appropriate the mood board to their own liking and have creative freedom to develop their sub-products in directions that they feel suitable.

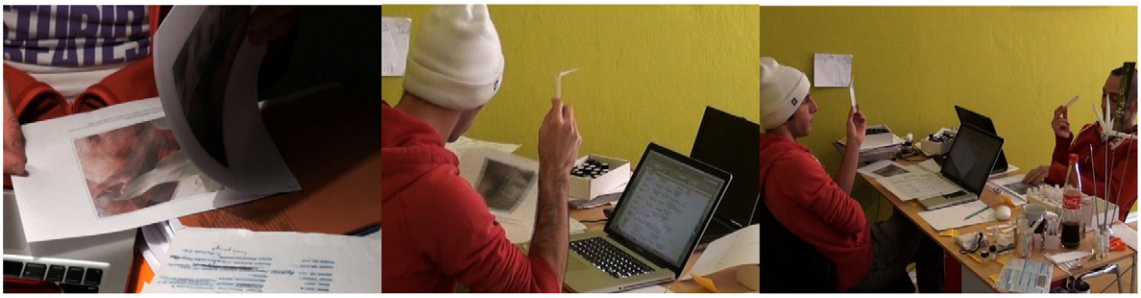

Fig. 4. The mood board in action: providing inspiration & direction.

Similarly, the photographer appreciates the freedom he has in turning the product into his own by making his own decisions.

> We (the creative director and photographer) talk about the idea, clarify some interpretations and, afterwards, it's really "here we go". If I am really not sure about something, I might ask for another feedback. But otherwise, I just do it the way I think is right. … I don't work much in traditional commercials. There are so many "cooks that spoil the broth" and everyone has something to say. … In the end, many products are totally stripped off their originality. This is how it is in the commercial sector … And here, I really enjoy it because it is really "my own" and because we know and trust each other. It fits very well and the work is fun.

Apparently, the experience of creative freedom activates a sense of autonomy that turns the work on the project into a joyful experience with the possibility for self-expression and signature style.

5. Discussion

Empirically, the paper explored the micro-processes of coordination in creative projects where creative workers and sub-products must be aligned in ways that promote creative freedom while preserving coherence. The key argument is that the mood board as visual object provides unique explanatory value in coordinating cross-disciplinary teams in the creative industries and elsewhere. As suggested by the examples above, creative freedom is provided not only by refraining from giving direction and vision, but by framing the director's vision in an artifact that allows multiple interpretive possibilities, and stimulates meaningful associations. The relevance of this core contribution to theory and practice is outlined below.

5.1. Managing creative workers and the materiality of organizing

When looking for new forms of organizing as a means for managing creative professionals (e.g., Gotsi et al., 2010), the mood board is able to maintain plurality and autonomy while also directing and aligning. It thus balances the seemingly contradictory challenges of organizing creative people (DeFillippi et al., 2007). However, these findings call into question the assumed dualism between coordination and creativity. The mood board allows both practices to co-exist by mediating the tensions between the two: Owing to the unique material affordances provided by the visual medium, visual images are able to direct without giving specific directives and orient people toward a general concept while still allowing diverse interpretations. These possibilities were further brought out in the compositional choices of the creative director, in which the non-literal forms of images, and the concrete, yet symbolic nature of the components were able to open up interpretive spaces without losing specificity. They were also brought out, however, in the use of the mood board by the creative director, who directed the processes from the outside using the image, which was non-negotiable in terms of composition, but then allowed freedom in the use and interpretation of the artifact among the different actors. This combination of direction and interpretive freedom allows the mood board to inspire and coordinate the workers without strait-jacketing them into the idiosyncratic vision of the director.

The paper's focus on materiality complements previous literature that highlights the mechanisms by which the tensions of contradictory requirements can be reconciled. The findings corroborate the centrality of affirming creative workers' quest for artistic expression (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007) and confirm the role of visions to hold various communities of specialists together (e.g., Cohendet & Simon, 2007; Nandhakumar et al., 2013). The paper adds to this literature by illustrating the material and, particularly, visual foundations upon which these exigencies are managed, drawing on the diverse material affordances of artifacts, such as visual briefings or mood boards used by actors to integrate seemingly contradictory requirements. Although mood boards might not be the only way for such tensions to be navigated (i.e., team members also communicate verbally, compare alternative scents, work with chemical formulae), visuality adds an important dimension to this process and, in this case, is positioned as a key driver of coordination by the creative director. Put this way, the problem of managing creative workers becomes, in part, a problem of choosing the supports whose material affordances match the requirements of production in a given sphere (Endrissat & Noppeney, 2013).

The use of materiality in collaboration is a growing area of study and draws largely from sociomateriality research related to science-and-technologies studies (e.g., Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). Here, we move from the largely technical use of objects to the aesthetic dimension, linking this to forms of working alone and working together. For example, going against Okhuysen and Bechky (2009), who stress the importance of common technical understanding among team members in applying effort towards commonly held objectives, such sharing of technical knowledge is unnecessary when specialized actors work on sub-products independently. Here, the integration is a question of *aesthetic consistency*, not of technical adjustment. The role of visual materiality is therefore not to communicate functional information, but to appeal to the senses of the actors involved in creative development. Similar to artworks, the mood board requires intense interaction evoking associations that influence the actors' thinking and action and providing a poetic definition of the final product. Likewise, the evaluation of the sub-products and the final product by the creative director is characterized by aesthetic judgments rather than technical features.

5.2. Coordination and the visual turn: visual organizing

Increasingly, contemporary organizations are marked by the absence of boundaries, temporal fluidity, and the flattening of hierarchies (e.g., Bechky, 2006; Kellogg et al., 2006) which has led to a shift in coordination mechanisms towards more emergent and non-formal ones, including objects, roles, and routines (Okhuysen & Bechky, 2009). Of particular interest for this paper is research that considers the role of objects and representations in coordinating cross-disciplinary product development (Bechky, 2003; Carlile, 2002, 2004; Henderson, 1991). The empirical data show how coordination is co-produced between the creative director, the mood board, and the different actors in the process. The coordination is a collective achievement that is illustrative of the notion of emergent organizing practices (Jarzabkowski et al., 2012; Kellogg et al., 2006). The present study adds to this research stream by highlighting the role of visual objects in coordination and contributes to the visual turn in management and organization studies (Bell & Davison, 2013; Bell et al., 2013; Meyer et al., 2013) by introducing the notion of visual organizing through mood boards.

The literature (e.g., Eckert & Stacey, 2003; Godlewsky, 2008) documents the power of mood boards as communication devices in design processes. However, their potential as coordination devices has remained largely unexplored. The findings in the present study supports the conclusion that by setting the scene, directing activities and aligning sub-products, and by establishing a point of reference, the mood board coordinates and organizes the process of product development, serving as a non-formal coordination device. In the current case, visual organizing facilitates this type of coordination, because the material affordances of the mood board suggest and direct attention towards creative paths, and they allow flexibility in how these paths are developed. The role of visual material and visual representation of ideas are likely to become more relevant in the context of an aesthetiticized economy (e.g., Reckwitz, 2012). Visual organizing goes beyond information and the so-called picture superiority effect (Paivio, 1971), which explains the efficiency and effectiveness of visual communication. The findings show that the visual material is able to align and integrate while allowing autonomy and self-expression. This ability is both concrete and abstract (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009; Rheinberger, 1997) and

provides structure in the individual and collective use (Star & Griesemer, 1989).

While visual organizing bears great potential, its limitations should also be considered. For example, visual organizing may be unable to address all aspects of coordination, being suited specifically to settings well-matched to resolution via visual affordances. For example, while spatial relations (or those that can be spatially represented, such as plans or timelines) can be easily mapped out on visual diagrams, other practices may be more difficult to coordinate visually. Additionally, increasing attention to multi-sensory aspects of organizing (e.g., Baxter, Lane, & Ritchie, 2013) suggests that scholars look beyond vision to other sensory modalities. Indeed, in the presented empirical case, the cross-modal work done between visual and olfactory material artifacts is itself an area of theoretical interest. Future research should thus specify which kinds of material modalities are suited for particular work situations, not assuming that visual stimuli will be appropriate in all cases.

5.3. The creative industries and beyond

Visual organizing is an aesthetic form of organizing. As aesthetics play an increasingly important role in organizations (e.g., Adler, 2011; Koivunen & Wennes, 2011; Ladkin, 2008; Linstead & Höpfl, 2000; Strati, 1992), aesthetic forms of organizing will gain in importance in the creative industries and beyond. For example, the luxury industry, which is closely connected to the creative industries in matters such as fashion, design, cosmetics and mainstream perfumery, is already using mood boards as source of inspiration for innovative, new ideas (Eckert & Stacey, 2003; Godlewsky, 2008). To the extent that product processes are becoming more unbounded, dispersed, and less hierarchical, the role of visual organizing should gain in momentum. Similarly, service industries that are increasingly under pressure to provide customers with unique experiences (e.g., Pine & Gilmore, 1999), evoking particular emotions or moods, may turn increasingly to visual organizing. Employees of cruise ships, hotels, or airline companies, but also of retail organizations, particularly of fashion brands, need to balance organizational guidelines that standardize services with demands to be authentic and sociable (e.g., Pettinger, 2004; Tracy, 2000). So far, most of the instructions on how to act and interact with customers and coordinate employees' behavior are provided in a textual form: handbooks and signs that remind the employees of the right behavior (Cooren, 2004; Tracy, 2000). Alternatively, visual organizing via mood boards may be able to transmit an organization's core values and emotional experience, while allowing space for authenticity and creative improvisation. Mood boards as an example of the wider phenomenon of aesthetic objects, hold the potential of connecting senses and emotions, and providing a link across people in the creative industries and elsewhere.

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